



National Longitudinal Surveys

U.S. Department of Labor
Bureau of Labor Statistics

NLSY79
User's Guide
1999

NLSY79

USER'S GUIDE

*A Guide to the 1979–1998
National Longitudinal Survey of Youth Data*

**Prepared for the
U.S. Department of Labor by
Center for Human Resource Research
The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio
July 1999**

This publication is prepared under contract #J-9-J-7-0051 with the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. None of its contents are to be construed as necessarily representing the official position or policy of the Department of Labor.

“Knowledge, in truth, is the great sun in the firmament.”

Daniel Webster
1782–1852

Acknowledgments

The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (NLSY79) cohort is an expansive survey sponsored by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, and conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago for the Center for Human Resource Research (CHRR) at The Ohio State University. Supportive funding has been provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the National Institute on Aging, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, and the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Additional funding has been provided by the U.S. Department of Defense and the Armed Services and the National Institute of Education.

This document pays tribute to the initiators of the National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS), Herbert S. Parnes and Howard Rosen, who had the vision to see that the collection of longitudinal data on the labor force experiences of men and women in the United States could provide a basis for policies fostering more efficient and equitable labor markets. Additional thanks go to the NLSY79's current Principal Investigator, Randall Olsen, who modernized and expanded the NLSY79.

Special thanks to the previous guide compiler, Gale James, and to the other members of the documentation team: Jean Haurin, Amanda McClain, Jennifer Hering, and Nathan Altice.

Jay L. Zagorsky
Linda White

Editors

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	iii
Help and Information.....	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 The NLS	3
1.2 Content of the NLSY79 Survey	4
1.3 Administration of the NLSY79 Project.....	5
1.4 NLSY79 Samples.....	6
1.5 Multiple Respondent Households	8
1.6 NLSY79 Children	9
1.7 Special Data Collections	11
1.8 NLSY79 Data Sets.....	12
1.9 Organization of the Guide.....	13
Chapter 2: Sample Design & Fielding Procedures.....	15
2.1 Sample Design	17
2.2 Screening	18
2.3 Sampling Process	19
2.4 Interview Schedule & Fielding Periods.....	22
2.5 Interview Methods & Target Universe.....	24
2.6 Reasons for Noninterview	27
2.7 Sample Representativeness & Attrition	32
2.8 Sample Weights	36
2.9 Practical Usage of Weights.....	37
2.10 Design Effects	39
Chapter 3: Guide to the Data.....	41
3.1 Survey Instruments.....	43
3.2 Types of Variables	55
3.3 NLSY79 Codebook System.....	59
3.4 CD-ROM Search Functions.....	72
Chapter 4: Topical Guide to the NLSY79	77
4.1 Age	79
4.2 Alcohol Use.....	88
4.3 Aptitude, Achievement & Intelligence Scores	93
4.4 Assets	100
4.5 Attitudes & Expectations	106
4.6 Child Care.....	114
4.7 Cigarette Use.....	120
4.8 Class of Worker	121
4.9 Crime, Delinquency & Arrest Records	124
4.10 Discrimination.....	129
4.11 Drug Use.....	131
4.12 Educational Attainment & School Enrollment	134
4.13 Family Background	142
4.14 Fertility	149
4.15 Fringe Benefits	157

4.16 Gender	159
4.17 Geographic Residence & Environmental Characteristics	162
4.18 Government Training & Jobs Programs	172
4.19 Health	178
4.20 Household Composition.....	185
4.21 Income	196
4.22 Industries	203
4.23 Job Characteristics	207
4.24 Job Satisfaction	209
4.25 Jobs & Employers	211
4.26 Labor Force Status	223
4.27 Marital Status, Marital Transitions & Attitudes	237
4.28 Military.....	244
4.29 Occupations	249
4.30 Pension Benefits & Pension Plans	252
4.31 Poverty Status & Public Assistance Support Sources	254
4.32 Race, Ethnicity & Nationality	261
4.33 School & Transcript Surveys.....	268
4.34 School Discipline.....	272
4.35 Sexual Activity & Contraception	273
4.36 Time & Tenure with Employers	277
4.37 Training	283
4.38 Wages	297
4.39 Work Experience.....	301
4.40 Workhistory Data.....	310
Chapter 5: Item Nonresponse	317
5.1 Introduction.....	319
5.2 Item Nonresponse by Section.....	320
5.3 Item Nonresponse by Respondents	325
5.4 Item Nonresponse within Problem Sections	328
Appendices	337
Appendix A: Quick Reference Guide	339
Appendix B: Standard Errors and Design Effects	344
Appendix C: NLSY79 Areas of Interest.....	348
Appendix D: NLSY79 Glossary of Terms.....	362
Index.....	379

List of Tables and Figures

Table 1.1.1 The NLS: Survey Groups, Sample Sizes, Interview Years & Status.....	3
Table 1.4.1 NLSY79 Sample Size by Subsample, Race & Gender for Selected Years	8
Table 1.5.1 Number of NLSY79 Civilian Respondents by Type of Household: 1979.....	9
Table 1.6.1 NLSY79 Mother & Child Samples: 1979–96 Surveys.....	10
Table 1.6.2 NLSY79 Child Sample Sizes by Age & Race/Ethnicity: 1986–96.....	11
Table 1.8.1 NLSY79: Current Data Releases	12
Figure 2.3.1 Number of Respondents Born Each Month by Birth Year.....	20
Table 2.3.1 Base Year Interview Completion: NLSY79	21
Table 2.3.2 NLSY79 Military Respondents Interviewed in 1979 by Gender, Race & Military Branch	22
Table 2.4.1 Fielding Periods: NLSY79 & NLSY79 Children	23
Table 2.5.1 Sample Sizes & Retention Rates by Sample Type: NLSY79.....	27
Table 2.6.1 Reasons for Noninterview: NLSY79 1979–98.....	29
Table 2.6.2 Reasons for Noninterview by Gender: NLSY79 1980–98	30
Table 2.6.3 Reasons for Noninterview by Race/Ethnicity: NLSY79 1980–98.....	31
Table 2.6.4 Reasons for Noninterview by Sample Type: NLSY79 1980–98	32
Table 2.7.1 Percentage of NLSY79 Respondents, Excluding Dropped Respondents, Who Answered Every Survey: 1979–98	33
Table 2.7.2 Cohort Characteristics by Race: 1979–98	33
Table 2.7.3 Number of Interviews Respondents Completed out of 18 Surveys by Sex: NLSY79 1979–98.....	34
Table 2.7.4 Number of Interviews Respondents Completed out of 18 Surveys by Race: NLSY79 1979–98	35
Table 2.7.5 Number of Interviews Respondents Completed out of 18 Surveys by Sample Type: NLSY79 1979–98	36
Table 3.1.1 Types of NLSY79 Survey Instruments & User Aids.....	44
Table 3.1.2 NLSY79 Question Numbering Conventions	49
Table 3.1.3 <i>Employer Supplement</i> Question Numbering Conventions: 1980–98	50
Table 3.1.4 Contents of the Separate Child Assessment Instruments.....	53
Table 3.3.1 NLSY79 1988 & 1993 Reference Number Assignment	60
Table 3.3.2 NLSY79 Young Adult Reference Number Assignment (1994).....	60
Table 3.3.3 NLSY79 Child Reference Number Assignment	61
Figure 3.3.1 NLSY79 Sample PAPI Codeblock.....	62
Figure 3.3.2 NLSY79 Sample CAPI Codeblock	64
Table 3.4.1 NLSY79 1979–96 Child Data Areas of Interest	76
Table 4.1.1 Age & Date of Birth Variables for Respondents: NLSY79 (1979–96).....	79
Table 4.1.2 Age Distribution of Respondents on Day of Interview (Unweighted Data).....	80
Table 4.1.3 Age Distribution of Respondents on June 30th of Interview Year (Unweighted Data)	81
Table 4.1.4 Computer Code to Create 1996 Interview Age Data	82
Table 4.1.5 Age & Date of Birth Variables: NLSY79 Child Data 1996.....	86
Table 4.1.6 Distribution of Child's Age in 1996 by Mother's Age at Birth of Child: All NLSY79 Children Interviewed in 1996	86
Table 4.2.1 Alcohol Variables by Survey Year: NLSY79	89
Table 4.2.2 Alcohol Variables by Survey Year: NLSY79 Children	92
Table 4.3.1 Aptitude & Intelligence Tests: NLSY79 School Survey, Transcript Survey & Profiles Testing	93

Table 4.4.1 NLSY79 Asset Questions 1979 to 1984	100
Table 4.4.2 NLSY79 Asset Questions 1985 to 1998	102
Table 4.4.3 Response Rates to Questions on Wealth: 1992	103
Table 4.4.4 Number and Percentage of Respondents Whose Assets Were Top Coded in 1985 and 1993	104
Table 4.5.1 Percent of NLSY79 Respondents Who Either Agree or Strongly Agree with Statement (Weighted Data)	106
Table 4.5.2 NLSY79 Expectations Questions	110
Table 4.6.1 Child Care Questions: 1982–98 NLSY79 Surveys Including the Special 1989 Child Care Supplement	116
Figure 4.8.1 Definitions of CPS Class of Worker Entries	123
Table 4.9.1 Number of NLSY79 Respondents in Jail or Prison at Survey Date	125
Table 4.9.2 Number of Respondents Reporting Participation within the Past Year in Illegal Activities by Gender & Race/Ethnicity: 1980 NLSY79 (Unweighted)	126
Table 4.9.3 Number of Respondents Reporting Contact with the Police and/or Criminal Justice System by Gender, Race/Ethnicity & 1979 Family Poverty Status: 1980 NLSY79 (Unweighted)	127
Table 4.9.4 Number of Respondents Reporting Engaging in Selected Behavior: 1988–92 NLSY79 Children (Unweighted)	128
Table 4.12.1 Educational Attainment & School Enrollment Variables: 1979–98	135
Table 4.12.2 Other Schooling-Related Variables	137
Table 4.13.1 Computer Code to Create Father's Age in 1979	143
Table 4.13.2 Religious Affiliation and Upbringing of Respondents (Unweighted Data)	145
Table 4.14.1 Questions Asked of Respondents in Long Fertility Section during Even Survey Years	150
Figure 4.14.1 Age at First Birth for NLSY79 Respondents as of the 1996 Interview	152
Table 4.14.2 Number of Children Born to NLSY79 Respondents by 1996 vs. Number of Children Desired in 1979	153
Table 4.14.3 Difference between Number of Children Born to NLSY79 Respondents by 1996 vs. Number of Children Desired in 1979	154
Table 4.15.1 Number of Civilian Workers Reporting the Availability of Various Types of Fringe Benefits at Their Current/Last Job: NLSY79 1979–98	158
Table 4.17.1 Select Residence Variables by Survey Year & Area of Interest: NLSY79 Main & Geocode Files	164
Table 4.17.2 Representative Types of County/SMSA Environmental Characteristic Data: NLSY79 Geocode CD-ROM	165
Table 4.18.1 Federally Funded Agencies Providing Government Jobs: 1979–87	173
Table 4.19.1 Percentage of Respondents Whose Current or Most Recent Job Provided Health Insurance Benefits	181
Table 4.20.1 Guide to the Household <i>Interview Forms</i> : NLSY79 1979–98	187
Table 4.20.2 Distribution of Respondents Living within Single & Multiple Respondent Households: NLSY79	189
Table 4.20.3 Number of NLSY79 Civilian Respondent Pairs Interviewed in 1979 & 1992	190
Table 4.21.1 Short Form NLSY79 Income Questions: 1979–82	196
Table 4.21.2 Long Form NLSY79 Income Questions: 1979–82	197
Table 4.21.3 Detailed NLSY79 Income Questions 1983–98	198
Table 4.21.4 Response Rates to Questions on Income: NLSY79 1992	199
Figure 4.22.1 Major Industrial Groups: 1970 <i>Census of Population</i>	203

Table 4.22.1 Industrial Sector of Civilian Respondents' Most Recent Job by Survey Year:	
NLSY79 Males 1979–96.....	204
Table 4.22.2 Industrial Sector of Civilian Respondents' Most Recent Job by Survey Year:	
NLSY79 Females 1979–96.....	205
Table 4.23.1 Variables Needed to Construct the Job Characteristics Index: NLSY79	207
Table 4.24.1 Variables Needed to Construct the Job Satisfaction Index: NLSY79	210
Table 4.25.1 Functions of the Various Job-Related Survey Instruments.....	213
Table 4.25.2 Instructions to Interviewers for Identifying the CPS Employer for Civilian NLSY79 Respondents: 1996.....	215
Table 4.25.3 Computer Code to Create Number of Jobs Ever Reported.....	219
Table 4.26.1 Definitions of Key <i>CPS</i> Labor Force Concepts	226
Table 4.26.2 Instructions to NORC Interviewers for Coding NLSY79 Respondents' Labor Force Status.....	229
Table 4.26.3 Definitions of NLSY79 Weekly Labor Force Activity Categories: NLSY79 Workhistory Data.....	231
Table 4.26.4 Created Summary Variables: 1979 to Current Survey.....	232
Table 4.26.5 Labor Force Status: NLSY79 Civilian & Military Respondents 1979–96 (Unweighted Data)	233
Table 4.26.6 Labor Force Status: NLSY79 Civilian & Military Respondents by Gender & Race/Ethnicity 1979–96	234
Table 4.27.1 Expanded and Collapsed Marital Status: NLSY79 1992.....	242
Table 4.28.1 Number of NLSY79 Respondents in the Active Armed Forces and Number Who Enlisted in Any Branch in That Year.....	245
Table 4.28.2 Military Pay Variables in the NLSY79 1979 Cohort	247
Table 4.29.1 Occupational Coding Classification Systems: NLSY79	249
Table 4.31.1 Sources of Public Assistance Support: 1979–98 NLSY79	256
Table 4.31.2 Poverty Status by Type of Residence: 1979 & 1988 NLSY79 Males (Unweighted Data).....	259
Table 4.31.3 Poverty Status by Type of Residence: 1979 & 1988 NLSY79 Females (Unweighted Data)	260
Table 4.32.1 Ethnicity by Racial/Ethnic Cohort from Screener (Unweighted Data).....	264
Table 4.32.2 Current Immigration/Naturalization Status: 1990 NLSY79 Respondents Born Outside the United States (Sample Cases)	265
Table 4.32.3 NLSY79 Child Sample by Race/Ethnicity: 1986–96 (Unweighted Data).....	267
Table 4.33.1 Transcript Data Collection, Rounds I–III: 1980–83 NLSY79	269
Table 4.35.1 Reported Age at which Respondents First Had Sex by Race and Gender.....	273
Table 4.35.2 Knowledge of When Pregnancy Most Likely to Occur	274
Table 4.36.1 Gaps in Employment: NLSY79 Main Files.....	279
Table 4.37.1 Core Data Collection: NLSY79 Training 1979–86 and 1988–98	284
Table 4.37.2 Training & Training Providers: Definitions from the NLSY79 <i>Question-by-</i> <i>Question Specifications</i> (1991).....	286
Table 4.37.3 Number of Respondents Participating in Training by Survey Year, Type of Training, Gender, and Race/Ethnicity: NLSY79 1988–94	287
Table 4.37.4 Types of Training Providers Identified in the “Other Training” & “Training” Sections of the NLSY79 Questionnaire: 1979–98	290
Table 4.37.5 Number of Respondents Participating in Training Programs by Survey Year, Type of Program, and Gender: NLSY79 1979–96.....	290
Table 4.37.6 “Other Training” & “Training” Sections of the NLSY79 Surveys: 1979–98	292
Table 4.38.1 Core Rate of Pay Variables: NLSY79 Main & Workhistory Files 1979–98	298

Table 4.38.2 Computer Code to Create Hourly Rate of Pay	299
Table 4.40.1 Average Number of Weeks Working Per Year for Respondents Who Provided Data in All Years from 1979 to 1996	315
Table 4.40.2 Number of Weeks Respondents Are Working, Not Working, and Unknown from NLSY79 1996 Work History CD-ROM.....	316
Table 5.2.1 Extent of Refusals, Don't Knows & Invalid Skips in 1979 NLSY79 Survey	322
Table 5.2.2 Extent of Refusals, Don't Knows & Invalid Skips in 1984 NLSY79 Survey	323
Table 5.2.3 Extent of Refusals, Don't Knows & Invalid Skips in 1989 NLSY79 Survey	324
Table 5.2.4 Extent of Refusals, Don't Knows & Invalid Skips in 1994 NLSY79 Survey	324
Table 5.3.1 Number of Respondents with Missing Data in 1979 Survey.....	326
Table 5.3.2 Number of Respondents with Missing Data in 1984 Survey.....	327
Table 5.3.3 Number of Respondents with Missing Data in 1989 Survey.....	327
Table 5.3.4 Number of Respondents with Missing Data in 1994 Survey.....	328
Table 5.4.1 Amount of Missing Data Per Question in the Work Experience Section, 1979 Survey.....	329
Table 5.4.2 Amount of Missing Data Per Question in Male Fertility Section, 1984 Survey.....	330
Table 5.4.3 Amount of Missing Data Per Question in Female Fertility Section, 1984 Survey.....	330
Table 5.4.4 Amount of Missing Data Per Question in Feeding Part of Fertility Section, 1984 Survey.....	331
Table 5.4.5 Amount of Missing Data Per Question in Child Part of Fertility Section, 1984 Survey.....	331
Table 5.4.6 Amount of Missing Data Per Question in Abortion Questions of Fertility Section, 1984 Survey.....	331
Table 5.4.7 Amount of Missing Data Per Question in Income Section, 1989 Survey.....	332
Table 5.4.8 Amount of Missing Data Per Question in Asset Section, 1989 Survey	333
Table 5.4.9 Amount of Missing Data Per Question in Alcohol Use Section, 1994 Survey	334
Table 5.4.10 Amount of Missing Data Per Question in Drug Use Section, 1994 Survey	334
Table A.1.1 List of NLS Documentation	339
Figure A.2.1 General Topics of the NLSY79 Main Data Collection	340
Table A.3.1 Frequently Asked Questions	343
Table B.1 Deft Factors for Round 1 (1979)	346
Table B.2 Deft Factors for Round 17 (1996)	346
Table B.3 Standard Errors for Round 1 (1979).....	347
Table B.4 Standard Errors for Round 17 (1996).....	347

Help and Information

This manual is one of a set of user-oriented documents available to the NLS research community containing information on the Original Cohorts (Older Men, Young Men, Mature Women, and Young Women), the NLSY79, the Children of the NLSY79, and the NLSY97. Persons interested in an overview on how to most effectively use the *NLSY79 User's Guide*, access the data, and get additional help when needed should refer to "Appendix A: Quick Reference Guide". Persons needing more information on the NLS in general or the NLS cohort groups are encouraged to obtain copies of the *NLS Handbook*. Persons interested in data collected on the Children of the NLSY79 will want to examine the *NLSY79 Child Handbook 1986–1990*. Summaries of research completed on the NLS over the past several decades are published on line in the NLS Annotated Bibliography of Research, located at <<http://www.chrr.ohio-state.edu/nls-bib/>>. Persons needing detailed information on the other cohorts should read the *NLS of Mature Women User's Guide*, *NLS of Young Women User's Guide*, and the *NLSY97 User's Guide*; contact NLS User Services for more information on the men's cohorts. Ordering information for NLS publications and data sets is available from NLS User Services, 921 Chatham Lane, Suite 100, Columbus, OH 43221-2418; Voice (614) 442-7366, FAX (614) 442-7329, or e-mail at <usersvc@postoffice.chrr.ohio-state.edu>.